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Sonnets to  
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Personages









Platen - Hohenstädt - Cooke - 1922  
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**SONNETS TO  
LITERARY PERSONAGES**

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

**PLATEN**

BY

REGINALD B. COOKE, PH.D.

*D.C. '09.*

ANDRUS & CHURCH  
ITHACA, NEW YORK

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MR. REGINALD B. COOKE

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## Foreword

This volume comprises the fifth series of my translations from Platen, containing twelve sonnets of somewhat circumscribed interest, addressed to, or otherwise concerned with, various persons of literary consequence, for the most part acquaintances of Platen.

Of these sonnets only the first of those addressed to Schelling has been previously translated into English, by an anonymous writer, and may be found in Longfellow's *Poets and Poetry of Europe* and also in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*.

The mottoes given here date from 1821, and complete the five which Platen prefixed at one time or another to editions of his sonnets.

Only twenty-three sonnets now remain to be translated, which it is proposed to group

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under the title *To Various Friends*. These will probably be found to be of greater general interest than the present series, containing as they do some of Platen's most impassioned work.

May I be permitted to note that since I began these translations eight years ago, I find that their style has become increasingly faithful to the original, yet at the same time increasingly wanting in flexibility and grace. The enjambement of the octave in the sonnet to Shakespeare, which has been recast from the first translation from Platen which I ever made, is a survival of my earlier method, and comes now with a sense of positive relief. Accordingly, with all my admiration for Platen's craftsmanship, probably unexcelled in modern literature, I cannot but feel that there is much to be said for the Miltonic idea of the sonnet as a fluent and more or less amorphous whole.

Cornell University.

R. B. C.



**SONNETS TO  
LITERARY PERSONAGES**



## MOTTOES

### I

The world grows more and more profane;  
No champions now the Faith sustain.  
What wrong hath the Eternal wrought  
That we but seldom give him thought?

### II

Know that so long as you let reign  
An epidemic of reflexion,  
In quarantine you must remain  
At Poetry's portal for inspection.

### III

Oh that I had but the power  
With vigor to route and avert  
From every poetical flower  
The political bugs and their dirt!



## TO SCHELLING—1

DOETH not he ever king in Truth's domain  
Reign too o'er Beauty's realm by kingly right?  
Thou dost behold them perfectly unite  
And closely fuse in one harmonious strain.  
This little present thou wilt not disdain;  
These oriental throngs with true delight  
Thou wilt survey, so picturesque, so bright,  
And grow accustomed to their strange refrain.  
On blooms of a far land admittedly  
I poise but lightly like the butterfly,  
Joying perchance in some mere vanity.  
But from the brims of flowers 'neath every sky  
Thou dipp'st the wing of the inviolate bee  
Into the mysteries of How and Why.

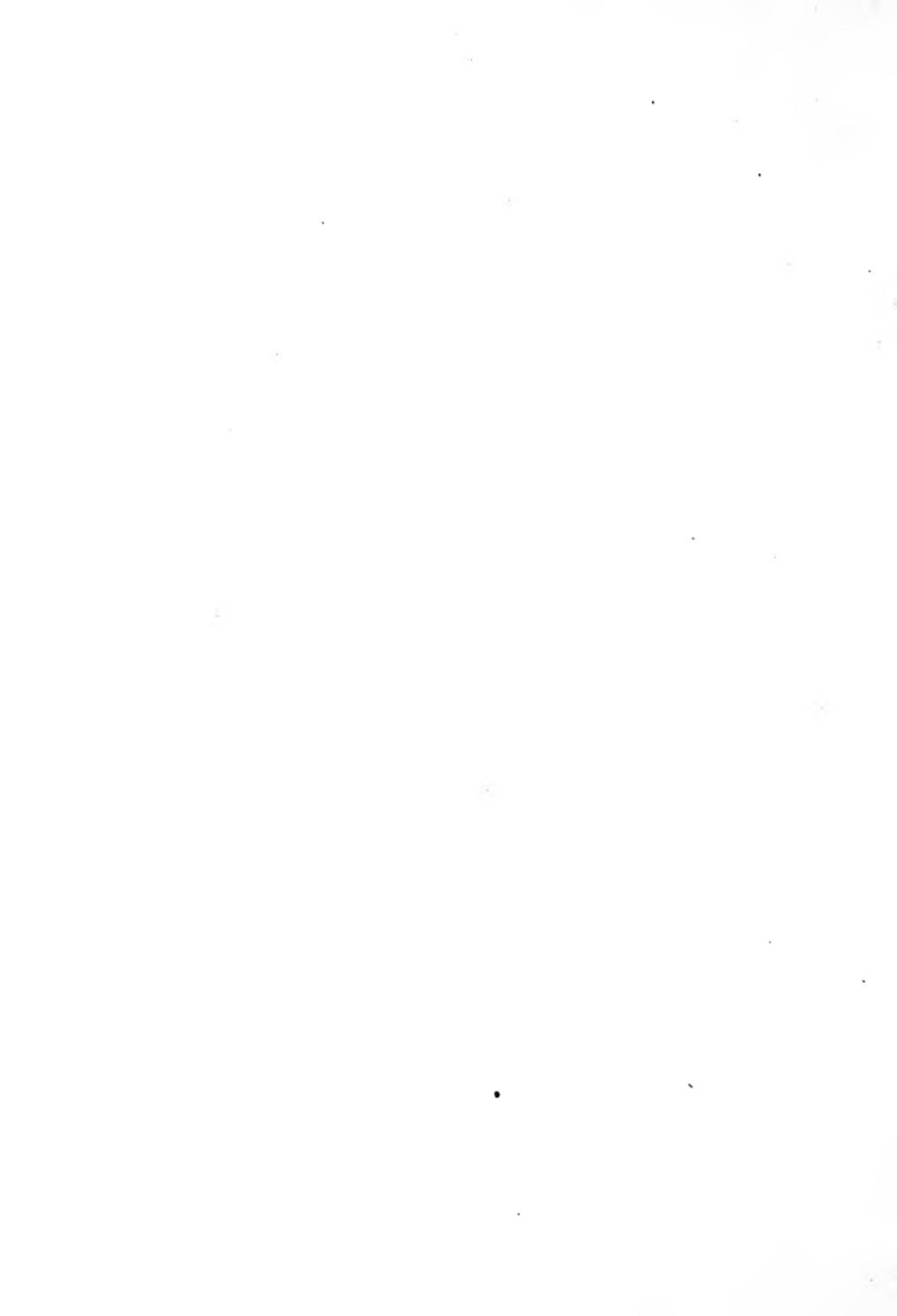
(1821)



## TO SCHELLING—2

WE hung upon thy words with zeal untold,  
Each in his seat how eager to detect  
Th' amazing flashes of thy intellect,  
Piercing like lightning from the clouds unrolled.  
Our fragmentary world thou dost behold  
Entire, as from some mountain peak erect;  
What our impoverished faculties dissect  
Opens to thee as flowering plants unfold.  
Though fools there be who wrathfully display  
Their logical invectives, so to blind  
Our senses to the worthless eggs they lay,  
Yet shall these censors, thinking fault to find,  
Stir not the world of learning, nor shall they  
At any time inspire a poet's mind.

(1821)



## TO SCHELLING—3

**A**S full of weariness sank to the grave  
A century, and left at our command  
Much that was great, thou cam'st, though scarce o'er-  
spanned  
Thy youth, the course of the new age to pave.  
Art saw thy coming, grasped the pilgrim's stave,  
And roamed at liberty through every land;  
Gladly to her the chill North and the bland,  
Luxuriant South their golden treasures gave.  
The air is filled with yelpings of the crowd,  
The stupid and the vile defile her fame,  
And owls through each foul breech do screech aloud;  
Yet all serene her diamond flowers flame,  
Whose fragrance permeates, like an incense cloud,  
The realms which bow to Christ's eternal name.

(1821)



## TO GOETHE

THOU, mighty one, whom I beheld oft blind  
To my true nature of a bygone year,  
Thee do I number now 'mongst those most dear  
To me, to whom my favor is inclined.  
To one whom truth imbues all undesigned  
The outward form harmonious must appear,  
And what to the unskilled may cause but fear  
Must nobly manifest the master mind.  
For in whose breast plenty and power upspring  
To him shall lordship proud o'er words belong,  
In toilsome rhymes to soar with nimble wing.  
He fashions the swift arrow of his song  
Deftly, and whatsoever he may sing  
Is wrought entire and knows no binding thong.

(1821)



## HAFIZ

THAT Hafiz is audacious to deny  
Were vain; such spirits chafe at leading strings;  
For he is like the eagle whose broad wings  
Strike the bright stars which circle in the sky.  
You may gaze after him, or mount on high,  
With him, his cloudless summits, where there springs  
Full many a bloom, and none the censure brings  
That all save one he passes heedless by.  
Whether you spend your powers for good or ill,  
'Tis but the form inspires with ecstasy  
The former, his own mission to fulfill.  
No fool infuses with disharmony,  
Nor with his dull stupidity can chill,  
The heart which all through life feels itself free.

(1821)



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(1821)



TO J. J. WAGNER

“ART is now dead, its message once expressed.”

A I see thee, crying this, turn up thy nose,  
As were we all stuck in a swamp, nor chose  
To sail abroad at Poesy's behest.

Th' Eternal is sold out, so hast thou guessed,  
As if we spoke merely of shop-worn hose.

That is the strongest trump thou canst disclose,  
Of all thy tricks that is the trickiest.

Never presume, ensnared by whims so vain,  
To comprehend the Muse's mysteries;  
Scarce shall thy wit this end at all attain.

Ne'er ask of us, whom falsehoods must displease,  
Though thee we love, that we should not disdain  
For love to yield ourselves to such as these.

(1821)



## TO SHAKESPEARE IN HIS SONNETS

**O**H who than thou can pierce the heart's depths  
deeper?

The best the lottery of life can lend  
Is ever thine; and when thy songs ascend  
Then are we silent as a speechless weeper.  
No idle maiden-dreams disturb a sleeper  
Whom we behold so fervently contend  
For friendship, saved from intrigues by thy friend,  
His beauty both thy glory and the keeper  
Of all thy grief. Even the gnawing care,  
Even the sorrows which he doth impose —  
Thou deemest all divine; and howsoe'er  
He pain thee by the heartlessness he shows,  
Thou ne'er forsak'st him, seeing with despair  
The worm of lust upon the lovely rose.

(1822)



TO JEAN PAUL

**A**S to thine image oft my thoughts would yield,  
Of duty unfulfilled must I repent,  
That I have made thee no acknowledgement  
Of love and gentleness to me revealed.  
Now hath Death frozen with his Gorgon-shield  
The gaze once rapturously heavenward bent,  
And these my wreaths of friendship must be sent  
After thee to an unfamiliar field.  
On thy good will my youthful heart depended  
For cheer, for heat renewed, the smoldering brand  
O'er which as yet but few faint sparks ascended.  
And now thy spirit sojourns in command  
Of youth and health and joy, whither had tended  
Ever its flight, in the rich Wonderland.

(1825)



## TO RÜCKERT

THY book yet scarce a third devoured, where lies  
    Proof of Hariri's art and proof of thine,  
Already what entrancing joys are mine,  
As I survey each page with frank surprise.  
When genius, begging through the world, relies  
On its own wits alone, 'tis seen to shine  
More genuine, more rare, and more divine  
Than ever, though a rogue's blouse its disguise.  
But now a friend and I, if so you please  
Rather than give two little books away,  
Must toss up for thy *Metamorphoses*  
*Of Ebu Seid.* Let not my hair grow gray,  
Nor part me from his virtuosities;  
So send another little copy, pray.

(1826)



## TO TIECK

FOR palates without taste thou hast selected  
Fruit from the garden of th' Hesperides.  
Thy Calderon is ridiculed by these  
Untutored Germans, as might be expected.  
The standards of Bad Taste, still undetected  
And unrebuted, triumph in every breeze;  
Scarce heeds the victor yet thy mockeries,  
Merely by words, though harsh, to stand corrected.  
Let the barbarians then pipe away,  
Hissing our poets, who themselves resign  
To popular indifference day by day.  
But never let them on the light divine  
Of foreign masters hands of violence lay;  
And cast no longer pearls before these swine !

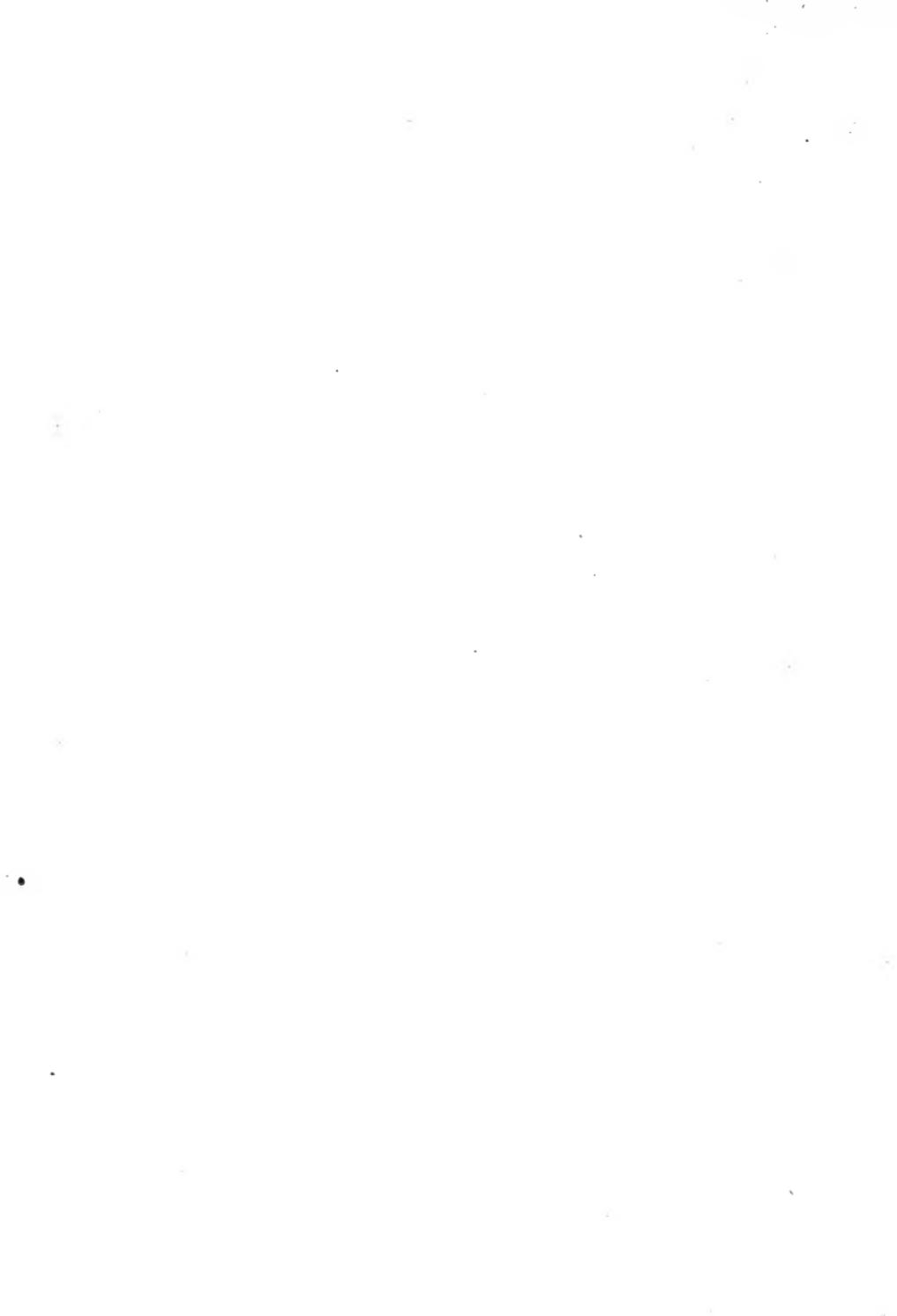
(1826)



## TO WINCKELMANN

IF I escaped canting hypocrasy,  
For this my gratitude be ever thine;  
Thy spirit found what time cannot design,  
Yet found it not in books of piety.  
For thee in heathen works, which lavishly  
Scatter its rays, the heavenly light would shine;  
For what is ever perfect is divine,  
And Christ himself bade that we perfect be.  
Gladly indeed would certain sable frocks  
Perplex the spirit, fain to be at ease,  
Or number us among the hircine flocks.  
Yet cease the heathen to bewail, for these  
Who can breathe forth their spirit into blocks  
Of marble are above our litanies.

(1826)

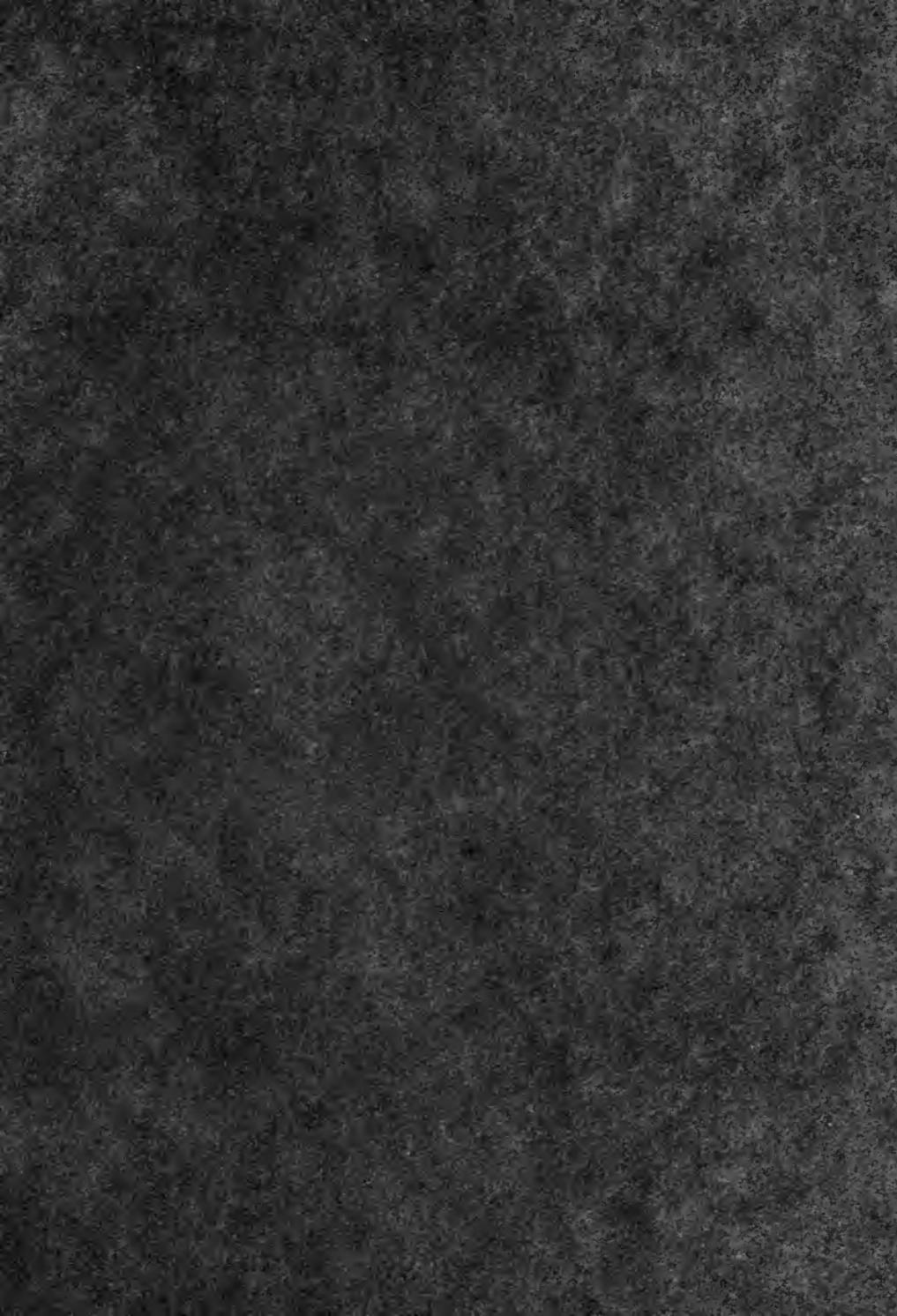


## TO SOPHOCLES

**G**OOD Sophocles, keen to discriminate  
The point where human and divine dispart,  
What thou embellishedst with earthly art  
Celestial voices would reiterate.  
Knowing its surface, thou couldst penetrate  
This world's recesses, and th' unspoken smart  
And silent longing of the human heart  
Mad'st with thy thousand tongues articulate.  
Naught hast thou cast in a prosaic mould,  
But scatterest with rare munificence  
Dense and resplendent sparks of flaming gold.  
A holy embassy thou didst dispense,  
Deep drinking Poesy's draughts, now to unfold  
The sheen of thy consummate excellence.

(1826)





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